



# Communicating in a Crisis

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## Crisis Communications for Emergency Responders

Training for:  
EPA Community Involvement Conference  
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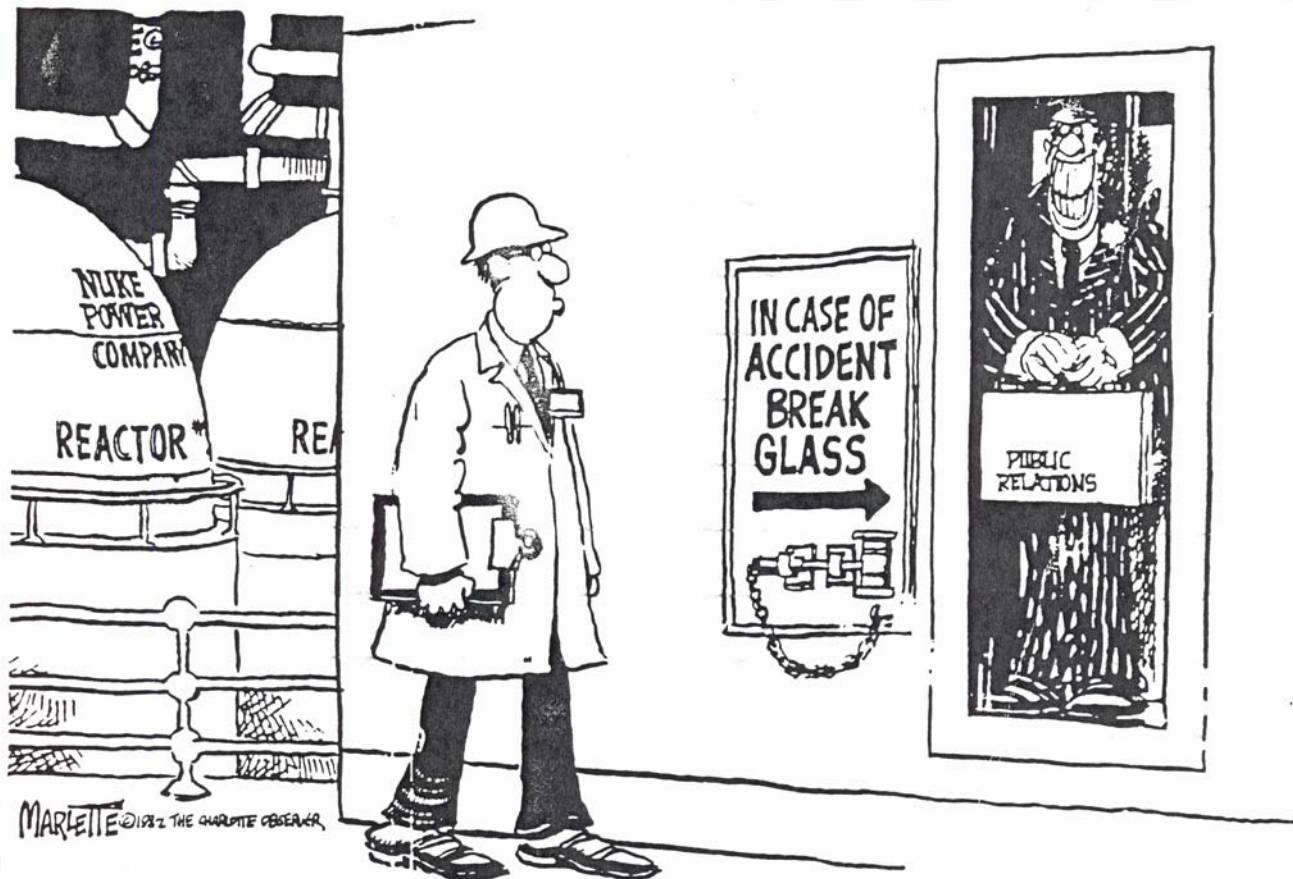
# Crisis Communications Training

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- Previewing the Guide
- Developing Messages
- Communicating Messages Effectively
- Using Communications Skills – exercise



# How not to do crisis communications



# Crisis Communications Training

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- Prepare before a crisis hits
- Work together – technical and public affairs expertise – to explain science to the public



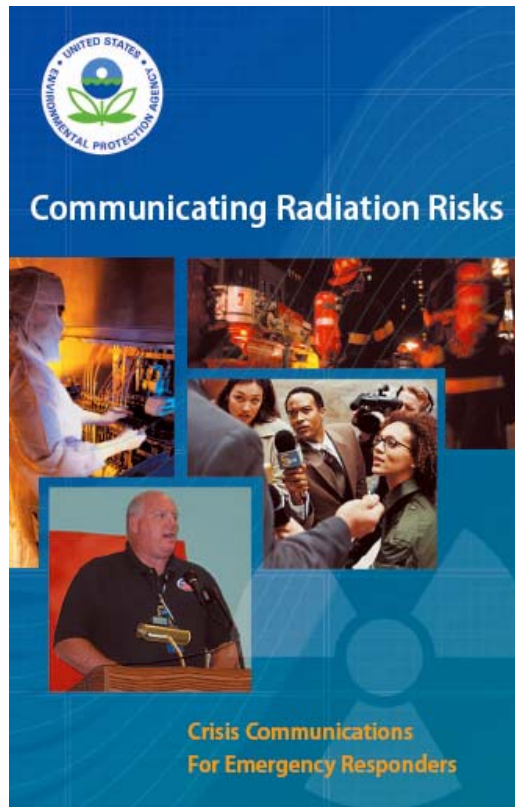
# Guide/Training Rationale

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- First responders often are first to characterize the emergency to the media and the public
- Past exercises and emergencies have shown the need for more effective communications
  - ✓ TOPOFF2, 2003
  - ✓ Ruby Slippers, 2004
  - ✓ Katrina, 2005



# Guide Features



United States Environmental  
Protection Agency

Office of Radiation  
and Indoor Air

EPA-402-F-07-008  
April 2007

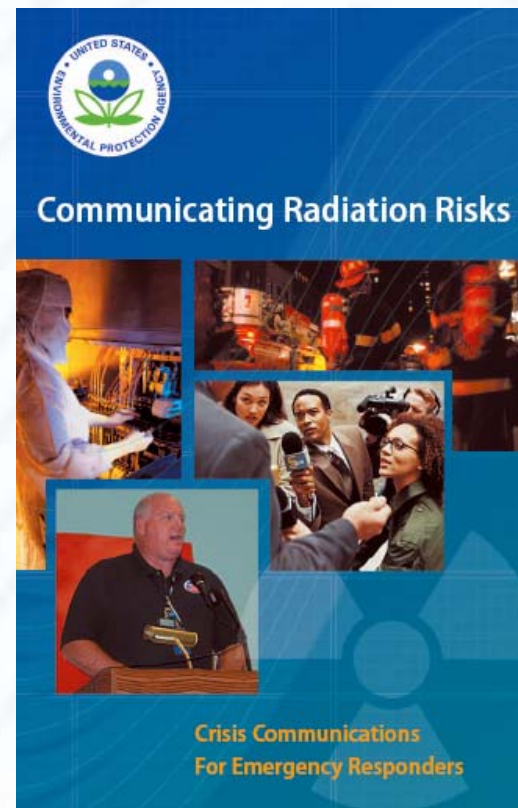
- Pocket-sized, spiral-bound for easy use
- Generic messages about radiological emergencies
- Specific messages for specific radiological emergencies





# Guide Features

- Guidelines on effective crisis communications
  - ✓ Developing sound messages
  - ✓ Being an effective spokesperson
  - ✓ Getting the messages out



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# Message Mapping 101

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Developing Effective Messages



# Key Elements

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- Identify Issue/Topic/Situation
- Define Audience
- Anticipate Questions
- Create Answers



# Anticipate Questions

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- Overarching
- Informational
- Challenge



# Exercise

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- Identify 10 of the most difficult questions you might get during a radiological emergency



# “Magic” Numbers

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- 3 key messages
- 27 words TOTAL
- 9 seconds



# Primacy-Recency

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Key Message 1 (most important)

Supporting Message 1

Supporting Message 2

Supporting Message 3

Key Message 2 (least important)

Supporting Message 1

Supporting Message 2

Supporting Message 3

Key Message 3 (second most important)

Supporting Message 1

Supporting Message 2

Supporting Message 3



## Key Message Example:

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
<b>Stay informed</b>	<b>Remove contaminated clothing</b>	<b>Wash yourself and your valuables</b>





# Delivery

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- Tell them what you are going to tell them
- Tell them
- Tell them again



# Completed Map Example

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
<b>Stay informed</b>	<b>Remove contaminated clothing</b>	<b>Wash yourself and your valuables</b>
Watch tv and listen to the radio	Place clothing in a plastic bag and seal the bag	Take the best shower of your life
Go to our website	Place the bag far away	Do not scratch or irritate your skin
Follow recommendations: they are for your safety	Clothes can be used later to determine if you were contaminated	Wash jewelry and contact lens



# Exercise

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- Choose 1 question to message map
  - ✓ 3 key messages
  - ✓ 27 words TOTAL
  - ✓ 9 seconds



# Key Elements

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- Identify Issue/Topic/Situation
- Define Audience
- Anticipate Questions
- Create Answers





# Communicating Messages Effectively

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Delivering and Disseminating Messages

# Communicating Messages Effectively

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- Developing compelling messages
- Being an effective spokesperson
- Getting the messages out to the media and the public





# Communicating Messages Effectively

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A brilliant scientific discourse is wasted if no one listens or understands it.

*Journal of the American Medical Association*

People need to know that you care, before they care what you know.

*Will Rogers*



# Being an Effective Spokesperson

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- Building credibility – through what you say
  - ✓ Convey caring and commitment
  - ✓ Demonstrate competence and expertise



# Being an Effective Spokesperson

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- Building credibility – through what you say
  - ✓ Respond to public concerns and media needs
  - ✓ Coordinate with other credible sources on messages and information



# Being an Effective Spokesperson

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- We are coordinating with state and local partners.



# Being an Effective Spokesperson

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- Building credibility – how you say it
  - ✓ Strong eye contact
  - ✓ Confident voice tone
  - ✓ Good posture
  - ✓ Appropriate dress



# Being an Effective Spokesperson

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## ➤ Losing credibility – how you say it

- ✓ Rolling, shifting eyes
- ✓ Slouching
- ✓ Nodding as if in agreement
- ✓ Distracting use of hands





# Communicating Messages Effectively

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- Developing compelling messages
- Being an effective spokesperson
- Getting the messages out to the media and the public



# Getting the Messages Out

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## ➤ Media Tactics

- ✓ Live interviews – telephone, in-person, radio, TV, or print
- ✓ On-the-spot, “ambush” interviews
- ✓ Press conferences
- ✓ Public meetings



# Getting the Messages Out

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- Stay out of trouble
  - ✓ You are not there to educate or please the reporter
  - ✓ Everything is always “on the record”
  - ✓ The microphone is always on



# Getting the Messages Out

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- Using a press conference
  - ✓ Reach the most media most efficiently
  - ✓ Schedule regularly during crisis
  - ✓ Show solidarity with other responders



# Preparing for a Press Conference

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- Determine your major spokesperson
  - ✓ Top local elected official
  - ✓ Local response officials – police and fire
  - ✓ Technical experts
  - ✓ Community service organizations
  - ✓ Community leaders
- Determine others on podium to respond or for visibility



# Preparing for a Press Conference

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- Decide on venue and logistics
- Determine agenda and timing
- Develop opening statement based on messages
- Anticipate questions and develop responses
- Invite media





# During a Press Conference

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- Opening statement(s)
- Media Q & A
- Role of the major spokesperson
  - ✓ Calls on media members
  - ✓ Determines who on podium will respond
  - ✓ Ends the conference : “thank you” and time for the next briefing
  - ✓ Maintains control – steps in, if necessary



## During a Press Conference

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- Maintaining control:
  - ✓ Remain calm even when badgered
  - ✓ Correct misinformation in a question
  - ✓ Ask a reporter to repeat the question if you don't understand it
  - ✓ Say you aren't familiar with information presented by the reporter



## During a Press Conference

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- Maintaining control:
  - ✓ Stay on message using a communications technique to transition back to messages
  - ✓ Bridge or segue



# Staying on Message



## During a Press Conference

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- Bridge to messages
  - ✓ What is most important here . . .
  - ✓ Let me put that in perspective . . .
  - ✓ Let me just add . . .
  - ✓ Another point I'd like to make is . . .





# Role Play

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# Exercise – Dirty Bomb

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## Press Conference Role Play

### ➤ The Scenario

- ✓ Dirty bomb goes off in a major metropolitan area
- ✓ The bomb goes off during morning rush hour
- ✓ A press conference is scheduled for 2 hours after the incident occurred





# Exercise

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## Press Conference Role Play

- Identify the types of people who need to be on the podium (i.e. – spokesperson, fire chief...)
- Assign roles
- Decide on overarching messages
- Create opening statements (each person at the podium should give an update)
- Prepare to take questions from “reporters”
  - Anticipate questions
  - Create answers





# Moving Forward

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- Conduct “train-the-trainer” training beginning internally
- Develop additional messages



# Final Thoughts

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- Be prepared
- Work with communications experts
- Expect the unexpected

